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Thursday, 17 July 2003, 10.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Ms. Menéndez	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Bulgaria	Mr. Tafrov
	Cameroon	Mr. Belinga-Eboutou
	Chile	Mr. Maquieira
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Germany	Mr. Pleuger
	Guinea	Mr. Boubacar Diallo
	Mexico	Mr. Pujalte
	Pakistan	Mr. Akram
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Wehbe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Negroponte

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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03-43075 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Roed-Larsen to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

I now give him the floor.

Mr. Roed-Larsen: Since the last briefing to the Security Council, on 13 June, the revived peace process based on the Quartet's road map has made encouraging progress. Hope is beginning to supplant despair after more than 1,000 days of violence and 3,500 deaths. Israelis and Palestinians are meeting regularly and working together at all levels. Those tentative steps are leading to more mobility for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Bethlehem and to more security for Israelis.

As agreed between the parties, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have withdrawn from parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Bethlehem. That has enabled the Palestinian Authority to begin to re-establish control over those areas.

A ceasefire that suspends attacks on Israelis has been reached among Palestinian groups and is largely being honoured. Regular meetings are occurring between the Palestinian and Israeli Prime Ministers, and Palestinians and Israelis meet frequently at the ministerial level to discuss such issues as security, prisoners, incitement, economic development, investment and health. Credit for this progress should go first to the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. They deserve to be commended for their courageous pursuit of the peace process. We urge them to continue meeting and to maintain the positive momentum they have developed.

The Quartet members, particularly the United States, have assisted the parties to reach that point. The United States has continued to demonstrate its commitment to this process by the recent visits to the region of Secretary of State Powell and National Security Adviser Rice, as well as by placing a full-time senior monitoring coordinator, Ambassador John Wolf, on the ground to work with the parties to fulfil their commitments. Quartet members stay in close touch with Ambassador Wolf's team. My Office, together with other United Nations agencies, is monitoring the situation on the ground, as we have for several years. We will continue to keep the Council informed of progress in implementing the road map.

The ceasefire announced on 30 June was achieved through the efforts of the Palestinian leadership and with the particular support of President Mubarak of Egypt. We urge all Palestinian groups to adhere strictly to the ceasefire. We call on the parties to stay the course in the face of possible future violations of the ceasefire. The peace process is too important to allow spoilers to dictate its pace or to set its agenda.

The Quartet — represented by Secretary-General Annan, United States Secretary of State Powell, Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov and, for the European Union, High Representative Solana, Foreign Minister Papandreou and External Affairs Commissioner Patten — met on 22 June at the Dead Sea in Jordan. This first meeting after the presentation of the road map to the parties and the Aqaba summit reaffirmed the role of the Quartet. The members took the opportunity to assess the status of the road map. They reviewed the steps that should be taken by both sides in order to move ahead, as well as the support we in the international community need to give to the renewed peace process. In the statement read out by the Secretary-General, the Quartet commended Palestinian Prime Minister Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Sharon for their statements of commitment to peace,

and pledged support to the parties to carry out those commitments. The Quartet in turn reaffirmed its commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). The Quartet also stated that it looked forward to continuing to work together in close consultation with the parties.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say clearly that the commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace requires that progress also be made on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process.

The challenges to the peace process remain numerous. Since the last briefing to the Security Council 49 people have lost their lives to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, namely, 40 Palestinians and nine Israelis. That raises the total death toll since September 2000 to 2,755 Palestinians and 787 Israelis. There has been a sharp decrease in violent attacks and incitement during this reporting period. Any fatality is tragic and needless. We are therefore pleased that the progress in the peace process has saved lives and lessened violence.

A peace process is now under way. Terrorist attacks are damaging to that process. The Palestinian Authority has a specific duty to assume security responsibility, first in those areas from which the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) has withdrawn and later in all the areas under its control. Israel and the international community should take steps and provide needed assistance to enable the Palestinian Authority to fulfil its responsibilities. Israel should continue its withdrawals and refrain from any provocative acts that could make the task of Prime Minister Abbas and Minister of State for Internal Security Dahlan more difficult.

The IDF has largely ceased security activities in those areas in which the Palestinian Authority has retaken authority. This is an encouraging development. Since the Israeli withdrawal from parts of the Gaza Strip and the announcement of the ceasefire, the IDF has refrained from extrajudicial killings. We strongly urge the Government of Israel to continue to refrain from targeted assassinations and to fulfil its right to defend its people within the boundaries of international humanitarian law.

Before I move on to the humanitarian situation, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the pressing need to create and build momentum. Both sides need to take steps that build trust and confidence. Each needs to demonstrate to the other that progress brings real and tangible benefits. Each needs to strengthen the capacity of the other to move forward through bold and courageous steps. To this end, we would strongly urge the Government of Israel to do more in terms of prisoner releases and in easing the daily living conditions of the Palestinians. I can think of few actions that would do more to build real trust and confidence. Prisoner releases in Northern Ireland set an encouraging precedent in this respect.

Unfortunately, since the last briefing to the Security Council, the humanitarian situation has seen little concrete improvement, despite the sharp decrease in violent clashes following the declaration of a ceasefire by Palestinian groups. The withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of the Gaza Strip has been accompanied by some easing of restrictions on the movement of Palestinian workers and commodities. But closures, curfews and checkpoints have not been relaxed significantly in the West Bank. As a result, the economic deterioration in the occupied Palestinian territory and the human suffering of the Palestinian people have not yet reflected the progress achieved in these early stages of the road map process. Even with a full Israeli withdrawal, improvements in living conditions will take time to manifest themselves. My Office, the World Bank and United Nations agencies continue to monitor the socio-economic situation. We hope that steps will be agreed to by the parties in the near future that will pave the way for necessary improvements in the humanitarian situation.

The construction of the separation barrier, or wall, on which we have regularly briefed the Council, is continuing. Construction has been particularly intensive in the Tulkarem-Qalqilya governorates and around Jerusalem. We again call on the Government of Israel to halt construction of the Wall. Its construction is a unilateral act not in keeping with the road map, because it makes more difficult the creation of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State. We understand that Israel has security concerns, but it is important that those concerns be addressed in a manner that does not create unfortunate facts on the ground. Israel must act in accordance with its international humanitarian law obligations and the road map.

We have reported to the Council the difficulties experienced by humanitarian agencies in entering and leaving the Gaza Strip. We have described the effects of the movement restrictions on the abilities of United Nations and other agencies to fulfil humanitarian needs and their mandates. I am pleased to report that movement through the Erez checkpoint has improved since the previous briefing. The all-donor Task Force on Project Implementation, currently chaired by my Office, which addressed these questions, continued to discuss questions of access with the Israeli authorities. While access has recently improved, it continues to be difficult to determine which part of the Israeli Government is the best address for access concerns. We call on the Israeli Government to provide the international humanitarian community with an empowered interlocutor to address donor concerns.

Aspects of the parties' progress in implementing their commitments under the road map deserve to be enumerated. First, since the previous briefing to the Council, the Israelis and Palestinians have agreed to, and implemented, an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Bethlehem in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority has re-established security responsibility in those places.

Secondly, Palestinian groups have agreed to a ceasefire that prohibits attacks on Israelis everywhere. The ceasefire is largely holding, but regrettable violations have led to the deaths of Israelis. During this period, Palestinians, too, have, regrettably, lost their lives. Overall, however, violence has dramatically lessened since the withdrawals and the ceasefire. We hope that the ceasefire will lead to the disarming by the Palestinian Authority of all armed groups, so that, as envisioned by Prime Minister Abbas and called for by the road map, weapons are held only by members of the Palestinian security services.

Thirdly, the parties have begun a regular series of ministerial meetings, including meetings between the two Prime Ministers, that provide for further agreements on issues that include prisoner release and security cooperation.

Prime Ministers Abbas and Sharon deserve and need our support for the bold steps they are taking. We must recognize that their actions are unpopular in some quarters of their domestic constituencies. However, it is encouraging that recent opinion polling has shown that clear majorities in both communities embrace the road map, reject terror and violence and endorse the establishment of a Palestinian State on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The international community should work actively to show its support in these early days of this still-fragile process. But as in any peace process, the parties must help themselves and each other. Each of the Prime Ministers must show results to his people, lest support for the peace process weaken. Each must assist the other in order to move the process forward.

Prime Minister Sharon must demonstrate to the Israeli people that participation in the road map process will lead to an end to violence and terror. Prime Minister Abbas can directly assist the process by continuing the reform and consolidation of Palestinian security forces. In order to do so, Prime Minister Abbas needs the active support of Mr. Yasser Arafat, who is the democratically elected President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. For his part, Prime Minister Abbas should also fulfil his commitment to take up security responsibility in those areas from which Israeli troops have withdrawn.

Finally, the Palestinians are beginning to work to end incitement in the Palestinian media.

Prime Minister Abbas must demonstrate to his people that the current efforts will improve the quality of their lives, that prisoners will be released and that progress is being made towards the realization of their long-held aspiration for a sovereign, viable and contiguous State. Popular support from ordinary Palestinians for the road map is essential to its success. It follows that the key to whether the Palestinians see the peace process as meaningful, and to whether Prime Minister Abbas's Government succeeds, lies largely in the hands of Prime Minister Sharon. By his actions, he can support or he can undermine.

Let me be clear where we stand. The Government of Israel should further ease and eventually lift the closure regime in the West Bank as a follow-up to the steps it has taken in the Gaza Strip. The peace process will seem real to Palestinians only when they are able to move freely, go to work and school, seek medical care and attend to other aspects of normal life without confronting checkpoints and humiliating procedures.

We are pleased that some steps in this direction have been taken by the Israelis. We are also pleased that there appear to be ongoing discussions aimed at the release of a significant number of prisoners. The

continued presence of settlement outposts established since March 2001 causes many Palestinians to question Israel's intent regarding this process. We urge the Government of Israel to continue its efforts to remove settlement outposts from the West Bank and prevent the erection of new ones.

The international community has a responsibility to take steps to assist the Palestinian Authority at the inception of the road map process. The all-donor grouping, the Local Aid Coordination Committee, which the Office of the Special Coordinator — my Office — co-chairs with the World Bank and Norway, is working with the Palestinian Authority to identify priorities for assistance. Quick-impact projects and longer-term development initiatives in those areas in which the Authority has taken up responsibility should be funded by the donor community. These projects could help the Palestinian people to see tangible benefits from the peace process. I should point out that the emergency appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remains under-funded.

Turning to the situation along the Blue Line, I am pleased to report that the overall relative calm that I mentioned in the previous briefing continues. Unfortunately, however, we remain worried about the continuation of certain actions that carry escalatory potential.

During my recent visit to Beirut, just two weeks ago, one unanimous concern animated all my interlocutors, namely, Israeli overflights in Lebanese airspace. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has reported recent increases in such air violations. We have repeatedly called on the Government of Israel to respect Lebanon's sovereignty over its airspace and abstain from overflights. Other members of the Security Council have informed us that they have also called for a suspension of the overflights. Unfortunately, our calls have not been heeded.

We also believe also that the anti-aircraft fire from the Lebanese side, which has increased, is worrying. According to UNIFIL reports, anti-aircraft fire has at times been unrelated to overflights. In addition, some rounds have landed in Israel, constituting a violation of the Blue Line with escalatory potential. A graphic example of this occurred on 5 July, when three rounds of Hizbullah anti-aircraft fire were reported to have fallen on the Israeli town of Kiryat Shimona. UNIFIL reports that another such incident occurred yesterday in another Israeli town. I await a full report as to precisely what happened. Whether this firing is in response to overflights or not, we hold to the basic principle that one violation does not justify a further violation.

UNIFIL has reported that on 4 July, after numerous protests, the anti-aircraft gun that had been placed in close proximity to UNIFIL position 8-32 was finally removed. The continued extension of the authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the south of the country would greatly assist in limiting the violations of the Blue Line from the Lebanese side.

The Secretary-General has on many occasions in the past called on both parties to meet their obligations and abide by relevant Security Council resolutions in fully respecting the Blue Line. We call again on both parties to cease those continuing violations in order to maintain what has been an otherwise relatively calm environment.

It has to be noted, however, that the stabilization of the situation in south Lebanon is best achieved by broadening the current peace process to encompass Lebanon and Syria, as contemplated in the road map. The Security Council has already certified that Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon represents the full application of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). The remaining issues between the two countries should be quickly addressed in order to pave the way for concluding comprehensive peace agreements.

The situation in the Golan Heights remains calm, with both Syria and Israel respecting their core commitments under the Agreement on Disengagement. That mutual respect of commitments is a good precedent and a reason for optimism in the region, as it shows that the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict do implement agreements when signed. The calm on the Golan should, and could, be turned into peace. There is therefore a solid basis on which to resume negotiations between Israel and Syria. Only last week in Damascus, President Al-Assad of Syria personally expressed to me his readiness to resume those negotiations, based on the previously agreed terms of reference.

In addition to visiting Damascus, during the last two weeks I have met with leaders from Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, all of whom expressed support for the current peace efforts and a desire to

broaden the process in order to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace. The road map stipulates a resumption of negotiations on both the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as early as January 2004. Such a development would greatly stabilize the peace process, including the Palestinian-Israeli track.

It is with pleasure that I report that the glimmers of hope that I spoke of when I last briefed the Council have been consolidated during the last few weeks. The atmosphere has improved considerably. The first halting steps — always the most painful — have been taken. Now is the time for the international community to rally its support of the parties as they proceed down the difficult path of the road map.

Peace processes, anywhere in the world, thrive on forward momentum. We must work to assist the parties to continue to move in a positive direction. Now is not the time for anyone involved in the process to look back in order to pit the past against the present in ways that could jeopardize the hopes of the future. Rather, we must put the past behind us in order to focus our energies on future peace and reconciliation.

Peacemaking, as we have said before, is not an event; it is a long, demanding and difficult process. The Israelis and Palestinians are at the beginning of that process. The end point, as agreed by the parties and the international community, is a just and comprehensive peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), and two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to Ambassador Miguel Angel Moratinos, who has recently stepped down as the Middle East envoy of the European Union. In seven years of work on the difficult issues of Middle East peacemaking, Ambassador Moratinos distinguished himself by his humanity, passion and diplomatic skills. I count him as a friend and will miss the partnership we have developed over the years. I welcome the new European Union envoy, Ambassador Marc Otte, and I look forward to working closely with him through the Quartet to implement the road map in the challenging period ahead. The difficulties are great, but so is the prize. Let us never forget that.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Roed-Larsen for his comprehensive briefing to the Council.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.